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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 002337

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TAGS: PREL PGOV IS EG KPAL
SUBJECT: PALESTINIAN FM ZAHAR'S VISIT TO CAIRO

Classified by ECPO MinCouns Michael Corbin for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Palestinian FM Mahmoud Al Zahar met with Egyptian General Intelligence Service (EGIS) Director Omar Soliman and Arab League Secretary General Amre Moussa during his April 15-17 visit to Cairo. Al Zahar did not meet with FM Aboul Gheit, or any other GOE officials. Al Zahar downplayed the absence of an Aboul Gheit meeting, saying he would see Aboul Gheit when he returns to Cairo at the end of his Arab tour. Aboul Gheit's decision not to see Al Zahar was intended to send Hamas a message. Publicly, Aboul Gheit was both "unavailable" and "out of town." However, the strength of the GOE's resolve remains uncertain; it is coming under strong public criticism that Egypt has caved to U.S. pressure and is insensitive to the needs of the Palestinian people. End summary.

¶2. (C) EGIS and Arab League Meetings: Palestinian FM Mahmoud Al Zahar met separately with EGIS Director Omar Soliman and Arab League Secretary General Amre Moussa during his April 15-17 visit to Cairo. Soliman declined to comment publicly after the meeting, but Al Zahar claimed Soliman had stressed Egypt's support for the political choice of the Palestinian people. Following the meeting at the League, which Arab permanent representatives also attended, Amre Moussa said they discussed the possibility of resuming dialogue with Israel within the context of the Arab Peace Initiative and the fact that bank accounts had been opened to receive Arab donations to the Palestinian "people." The roadmap was not discussed, Moussa clarified.

¶3. (C) No MFA meeting: Al Zahar did not meet with FM Aboul Gheit, or any other MFA official, during his Cairo stop. The reason, Al Zahar alleged, was not political, but rather because Aboul Gheit told him he had scheduling conflicts and would be out of town. (Note: Aboul Gheit was in town. End note). Al Zahar said that he would see Aboul Gheit when he returns to Cairo at the end of his regional tour.

¶4. (U) Al Zahar's public statements: According to press reports, Al Zahar considered his visit a success because he obtained a commitment at the Arab League meeting regarding financial and political support for the Palestinian government. He also denied that Egypt is pressuring Hamas and said Arab countries have not linked assistance to the Palestinian government to any conditions. The League, he said, only urged him to "consider" the Arab Peace Initiative.

¶5. (C) Media reaction to the visit was mixed, with pro-government papers minimizing coverage. The opposition papers covered the visit more heavily with some calling it a

"success" and others criticizing Aboul Gheit for not meeting Al Zahar. The mood on the street suggests that some Egyptians are concerned that Egypt may be bowing to U.S. pressure at the expense of their Palestinian neighbors.

¶ 6. (C) Comment: Although Aboul Gheit's decision not to meet Al Zahar sent a message to Hamas, Aboul Gheit may still see him on a future visit especially if the public mood continues to question the GOE's weak support for the Hamas government. Despite our efforts to explain that the USG will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, the average Egyptian believes that the West has "cut off" the Palestinians and that Arab governments have an obligation to step in.

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